

**Congressman Marty Meehan**  
**Rules Committee Testimony on Lobbying Reform**  
**March 30, 2006**

Chairman Dreier, Ranking Member Slaughter, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify on lobbying reform today.

Mr. Chairman, there is an ethical cloud hanging over Congress today. It's a major reason why Congress has lost the confidence of a majority of Americans. Congress's approval rating is just 27% - - an all time low.

The relationship between Congress and K Street has gotten too close and too cozy. The last major piece of lobbying reform legislation was passed in 1995. Since then, the industry has grown exponentially, while disclosures have become less frequent. According to the Center for Public Integrity, only one in five lobbyists who are required to register actually does so. Of the 250 top lobbying firms, 210 failed to file one or more of the necessary documents.

To make matters worse, oversight is nearly non-existent and penalties are weak. The laws have failed to keep pace with the changing nature of lobbying and the process is in desperate need of reform.

I would like to focus my remarks on three areas: Slowing the Revolving Door; Creating an Office of Public Integrity; and Increasing Lobbying and Grassroots Disclosure.

There's a revolving door between Congress and K Street that gives lobbyists special access because of their past government service.

Last year, I introduced a comprehensive lobbying bill with Congressman Emanuel to change the relationship between Congress and K Street.<sup>1</sup> Currently, there's a one-year waiting period before former members of Congress and senior government employees can walk through the "revolving door" to become lobbyists. As contained in our bill, any lobbying reform proposal should double this waiting period to two years -- at the very minimum.

The lobbying reform package should also include a new Office of Public Integrity. Congressman Shays and I introduced legislation to do this.<sup>2</sup>

Partisanship has rendered the Committee on Ethics ineffective and the Ethics process in the House has become broken.

The Office of Public Integrity would be a nonpartisan office, similar to the Office of Compliance. The Office would be comprised of professional staff who would investigate non-frivolous complaints of potential ethics violations and present its findings to the Ethics

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<sup>1</sup> The Special Interest Lobbying and Ethics Accountability Act, H.R. 2142 (Meehan/Emanuel)

<sup>2</sup> H.R. 4799 (Shays/Meehan)

Committee for adjudication. The Office would also provide both formal and informal guidance to Members and their staff on House and Senate rules. Finally, the Office would provide informal guidance to registered lobbyists about reporting requirements and conduct random audits of reports.

To ensure there are adequate checks and balances, a two-thirds majority of the Ethics Committee could vote to stop investigations at several points in the process. The Office of Public Integrity would investigate and present cases, but the Committee on Ethics would still make the final decision on whether a violation had occurred.

Lobbying reform must also include increased disclosure requirements for grassroots lobbying. Paid advertising, phone banks and other paid efforts to stimulate grassroots activity to influence public policy are now as widespread as direct lobbying. The public deserves the same level of transparency for both types of lobbying. Under current law there is no disclosure of paid efforts to influence Congress through grassroots lobbying. The funding of grassroots lobbying by Jack Abramoff and his associate Michael Scanlon took place outside the disclosure requirements of the Lobby Disclosure Act.

We should require professional grassroots lobbying firms to register if they are retained by clients to engage in grassroots lobbying campaigns. They should have to file reports disclosing the income they receive relating to paid grassroots campaigns, and the amount spent on paid advertising. The reporting requirement should apply only to large firms, which receive more than \$25,000 in a quarter for grassroots lobbying.

As we move forward with this debate, Congress needs to make an important decision. Does Congress want to be an outlet for special interests awash in money and accountable to no one? Or do we want to return to our democratic roots of transparency and accountability?

The scandals are not going away. As investigators continue their work and the news media exposes more unethical practices, momentum will continue to build for lobbying reform.

I urge the Committee to include the lobby reform provisions that I have explained today. If these provisions are not included, I hope the Committee would allow these provisions to be offered as amendments.

Again, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today.